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ABSTRACT

Noting that the literature of the Vietnam War can have a powerful impact on students, this paper discusses why such literature should be taught, what types of literature should be taught, and how teachers might go about teaching some of the literature. The paper begins by presenting numerous student responses to various novels on the Vietnam War, and considers what these responses by high school and college students reveal. The paper then discusses the four main types of young adult literature that have emerged in response to the Vietnam War: the combat narrative, the war at home, novels dealing with the refugee experiences, and works that focus on the legacies of the war. Next, the paper suggests ways to teach this literature, including: a variety of follow-up writing assignments; "opinionnaires" completed by students that serve as the basis for class discussions on attitudes about the Vietnam War and about homelessness; and discussion and writing assignments following the viewing of a documentary film about the war. The paper concludes that teaching the literature of the Vietnam War can encourage student response, show students the value of literature, and help them make connections to literature that will enrich their lives long after they leave the classroom. Thirty-eight references, a 30-item selected and annotated bibliography of literature on the Vietnam War; writing assignments, discussion questions, and opinionnaires on homelessness and on thinking about the Vietnam War are attached. (RS)

Transforming Hearts and Minds with the Literature of the Vietnam War

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for
University of Notre Dame Conference:

The United States and Viet Nam: From War to Peace

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I am going to try to answer three questions here today: First, why teach the literature of the Vietnam War? Second, what literature should we teach? And, finally, how might we go about teaching some of this literature? In addition, I am going to address these questions in a particular context: that is, I am going to be talking about the why, what, and how of teaching in terms of secondary and lower-division undergraduate classrooms. Finally, in order to explain the why, what, and how and prove my contention that the literature of the Vietnam War can have a profound impact on students, I am going to start with student responses to the literature of the Vietnam War. I want to show you how high school and college students typically respond to some Vietnam War literature, and talk a little bit about what these responses reveal. After examining student responses to Vietnam War literature, I'm going to discuss some literature that you might want to try

teaching in your own classes. Finally, I'm going to show you some teaching strategies for some of this literature. Along the way, I'm going to try to explain why this literature can have such a powerful impact on students, and how teaching it fosters students' responses to literature.

Why Teach the Literature of the Vietnam War?

Why teach the literature of the Vietnam War? In the preface to his book, *Teaching Hearts and Minds: College Students Reflect on the Vietnam War in Literature* (Carbondale: SIU Press, 1992), Barry Kroll states that his book was shaped by an investigative aim, but also by his desire "... to demonstrate some of the possibilities of undergraduate education, exploring what can happen when students are engaged by a topic and encouraged to inquire into it. Thus there is a strand in the book that is frankly celebratory: I want to tell readers how exciting this course was for both teacher and students" (ix). In other words, what Kroll discovered in teaching a course on the literature of the Vietnam War is that this topic, this literature, engages students and the teacher. In addition, through what happened to him and and his students in this course, Kroll comes to realize "the possibilities of undergraduate education," or, stated another way, he comes to understand what teaching and learning are really all about. Put as pure and simply as I can, we should teach the Vietam War because it is exciting, and it is exciting, in part because students are interested in it. In addition, if we encourage engagement and encourage students to inquiry into this topic they are interested in, then the results will be far beyond our expectations.

Student Response to the Literature of the Vietnam War

Just as Kroll (1992) discovered in teaching his course, many teachers who have taught the literature of the Vietnam War report that student response always goes beyond their expectations (Carter, 1989 & 1991; Endress, 1984; Johannessen, 1992 & 1993; Kroll, 1992; Mandel 1988; and Oldham, 1986). Let me just give you a few examples of how some of my students have responded to this literature, and talk a little about what these responses reveal.

The first two student responses are to James Webb's novel *Fields of Fire* (1978).

> Response #1: *Fields of Fire* was the most interesting, eye-opening novel I have ever read. It helped me understand what actually happened in Vietnam and helped me disregard my misconceptions I had had previously.

> Response #2: Senator's change in values was brought about mostly by the killing of New Mac which Senator feels was his fault. Senator recounts the story of New Mac's death to the two students who ask him to speak at the anti-war rally. He tells them,

> > A little babysan sucked me right out into the open so the NVA could start an ambush. I was a team leader. I had a kid who was going to shoot her. I knocked his rifle down. Just in time to see him shot in the face. Do you know how it feels to know you caused that. I'll see his face staring at that babysan

> for the rest of my life.... If I hadn't had the shit blown out of me, it would have given me great pleasure to hunt that little girl down and blow her away (407).

This is a very different Senator speaking than the one who refused to fire on fleeing figures because they looked like innocent villagers (157). Senator is admitting that it was his sense of morality that resulted in the death of New Mac. More importantly, he now realizes what the other men knew all along: that his loyalty belongs to those he served with, to those who were loyal to him, [and] ... it is this incident more than anything else that brought about his change in values.

The first response is from a course evaluation. Notice that reading the novel helped this student overcome some of his misunderstandings about the war, and notice how he openly talks about how engaging the work was. The second response is an excerpt from an analytical essay about one of the major characters in the novel. Notice how this student is engaged in critical analysis of the novel, the kind of analysis Kroll talks about in his book.

The next two student responses are excerpts from compositions on Tim O'Brien's memoir, *If I Die in a Combat Zone: Box Me Up and Ship Me Home* (1989[1969]). Notice that the first student gained an understanding of how changed those who went to Vietnam were when they returned. The second student learned an important lesson about the true meaning of courage, especially in terms of how it is typically portrayed in war films.

Response #1: I agree with O'Brien that war doesn't leave you pure and free, innocent and fresh. You can't go home "barefooted" because part of you, for better or for worse, has changed forever. Vietnam will be forever etched upon a soldier's mind, a soldier's soul, a soldier's heart.

Response #2: O'Brien wants readers to understand that war does teach you something. Courage is not merely charging forward as portrayed in the John Wayne myths. War challenges each man individually and fear dominates and for a minute a soldier might be less than a man because he is so afraid.

The next response is from a course evaluation. Students were asked to evaluated the works studied in Vietnam War literature course. This student is talking about Mark Baker's oral history *Nam* (1981). Notice that this student had studied the Vietnam War in history (in fact, this student was a history major), but that reading this particular work gave him new insight into what the war was like for the soldiers who fought in Vietnam.

After reading about what these boys had to live through, I learned something that I did not learn in history class. I learned what the Vietnam War was like from the eyes of the soldiers there--not as it was for the politicians safe in Washington, D. C.

The next seven responses are all excerpts from compositions students wrote after seeing the documentary film, *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam* (1986). Notice the rather remarkable diversity of reactions to the

film--everything from thanking a Vietnam Veteran (response #1) to the realization that war, any war, is simply a waste (response #7).

Response #1: I recommend the movie to all people who have misconceptions of what the war was like and about the men and women who fought it. I assure them, they will leave the film with a tear in their eye and a desire to find a Vietnam veteran and hug him or her!

Response #2: One startling factor of the film was in finding out that the people in America knew little or nothing about what the war was really like. In hearing that a mother sent her son "wing tips" [shoes] while he was in 'Nam, I wanted to slap her and tell her to wake up! This woman had to be really stupid or totally denying the truth to think her son could use wing tips in Vietnam.

Response #3: Another letter that really affected me was the one regarding the killings of four [students] at Kent State. The United States was in an uproar over this, but they did not seem to care about the thousands of soldiers getting killed in Vietnam. This letter was filled with all the pent up anger and frustration of the soldiers in Vietnam. These soldiers are risking their lives for their country but nobody at home seemed to care. To them (people at home) the occurrences in Vietnam did not affect them. It was happening in another country thousands of miles from home. The letter also contained a note of desperation. A desperate longing for the war to

end, for the United States to become aware of what the soldiers were going through day after day as well as a longing to go home.

This movie taught me many things about the Vietnam War. It gave me an insight to the feelings of the soldiers as well as their families. This was a war I never learned about in school, yet this movie taught me more than any book could have. it gave personal insights of those who were there first hand, such as their uncertainties, fear and hatred of a war. It is something I will never forget.

Response #4: Something that struck me was who the soldiers saw as the enemy. The answer was practically everyone and everything. These men "had to kill to survive." The enemy already had the advantage of fighting on their turf and the one thing we could not give them was opportunity. Before I really learned about the Vietnam War I used to wonder how our men could be so cruel as to kill children and families. The fact that the enemy used them to get to us made my skin crawl. No wonder "it's so very easy to kill in a war."

Response #5: The letter home that really struck me was the one by Raymond Griffiths. He writes to his friend how worried he is that he will lose his girlfriend. This reminded me of my boyfriend and I thought how romantic it would be if he went away to war and remembered me in the middle of all the fighting. But, as I was imagining this, Ray's picture appeared on the screen, and under it flashed the words, "Raymond Griffiths was killed a few weeks later on the Fourth of July. He was 19 years old, the average age of a combat

soldier in Vietnam." As I read those lines a feeling of guilt came over me. How could I ever imagine (wish) or consider such a thing--wanting my boyfriend to go to war just so I could receive a romantic letter from him? I felt guilty as I imagined my boyfriend in war risking his life because I wanted a little romance.

Response #6: It [this film] brings the viewer into personal contact with the soldiers. You know them as people, not as indespensible Rambos as we are all to often led to believe. You understand that they have feelings, fears and desires and that they were scared as hell. They just wanted to come home. The movie stays with you as you realize that too many came home rolled up in the American flag--the reason they were there to begin with.

Response #7: After viewing the film, the questions that went through my head were "Why do we go to war and is it worth it?" One soldier was asked, "Do you think that it is worth it?" And his reply was, "They say we are fighting for something but I don't know." After seeing how the soldiers suffered from day-to-day, wondering when they will go home or even if they will still be alive the next day, doesn't put a doubt in my mind and I don't think that it is worth it.

Finally, the last three excerpts are in response to Bobbie Ann Mason's novel *In Country*(1989).

Response #1: But there is hope at the end of the novel. This comes about by the reconciliation that comes to Sam, Emmett, and the

nation. Sam comes to realize her searching is related to the fact that part of herself died with her father, and she comes to accept that she cannot really know the whole truth about her father, what he was like and how he died. Emmett finds reconciliation when he studies his buddies' names on the wall. "He sits there cross-legged in front of the wall, and slowly his face bursts into a smile like flames." Like the phoenix bird, Emmett will rise from the ashes of his dead life. The wall itself, with the millions of visitors yearly, pushes forward the nation's reconciliation. Most of the tourists are silent and reverent at our country's Wailing Wall. Through it the country is experiencing a healing catharsis.

Response #2: For Sam, the moment of truth is when she sees her own name engraved on the wall. This seems to affect her more than seeing her dad's name. I think she finally realizes that a part of her died with her dad and she will never get this back. She comes to terms with her dad and the war and will now be able to proceed with her own life. She also realizes that she must forgive her dad and accept that he was only doing what anyone in his shoes would have done. Who knows, she may even look back some day with pride that her dad died for her and her mom.

Response #3 (a ninth grade student): I found this book very interesting and realistic because I too am the daughter of a Vietnam vet and I saw reflections of myself in Sam. I thought this book was genuinely lifelike because of it's portrayal of people and their emotions, and how it made you feel and relate to their emotions. For

instance, the vets were usually reluctant to talk about Vietnam, and had to be coaxed into speaking about it. When I ask my dad about Vietnam, his usually expressive voice gets dull and flat, his warm, bright blue eyes turn to ice and he gazes at something invisible to me. Sometimes I think he is imagining Vietnam again, like it wasn't even real, like it was just some drug trip, or a dream, or a nightmare. Sometime I speculate on why these vets think of their experience in such a manner and the only reason I could think of is how they were treated when they came home. Vietnam was the first war where the soldiers weren't honored or called heroes, rather booed and hissed while they were called murderers. I don't know if this is due to the fact that Vietnam was the first war that everyone thought was a mistake or because we "lost", but this was the first war I can think of where the people actually stated that our soldiers killed anyone. In all the other wars, that truth was never actually expressed out loud, as if those soldiers never killed.

I also related to Sam's realization that her father killed people. I've always struggled with this abstract idea and it's been especially hard to come to terms with because I am Catholic and the "Thou Shalt Not Kill" philosophy has been shoved down my throat, er, I mean taught to me for years. So, like a good Catholic girl, I shared by most private thoughts with some self-righteous religion teacher only to be told that all killing was wrong or that only I could make that decision. It was then that I began to realize that no one else, not even religion teachers, knew the answers to these deep moral questions and probably thought I was a smart-ass for asking. So in the end, I just

accepted what my dad told me: "Well, Caroline, out in the jungle it was either kill or be killed, and I'm here now."

Another point that I have pondered many a sleepless night is how Vietnam seems like a myth at times, so I bring it up in discussions all the time, keep articles on it, look for maps of it, and ask my dad about it, because I'm almost afraid that if someone doesn't know about it, and keep up with it, Vietnam will be forgotten, and float away from our memories ...

The first two responses discuss the ending of the novel. The first one is a sophisticated analysis of the ending, but notice also how the student compares the ending to what is actually happending at "The Wall" in Washington, D. C., or, in other words, in the world outside of the novel. In a similar manner, the second response presents an interesting interpretation of what the ending means to Sam, the main character, and notice how the student is moved by Mason's ending to see further possible reconciliation on the horizon for Sam.

The third response to this novel is perhaps the most interesting and important of all the responses I have here. Notice, of course, that this was written by a ninth grade student, a daughter of a combat veteran of the war. She is able to relate to Sam, and she sees how her own father is like the Vietnam veterans Mason presents in her novel. She is, in other words, better able to understand her father as a result of reading the novel. She sees the war in her father's face, and in trying to understand his reactions to the war, she has a very important insight about how the Vietnam War is different from other wars. She is also able to relate to Sam in another and perhaps more important way that is also related to a key point that I am

going to be talking about today: the way in which this literature speaks to students in compelling ways about ethical or moral issues as perhaps no other literature is able to do. This student, like the character of Sam, wrestles with the morality of killing in war, and the fact that her father killed people. This student, just like Sam in the end of the novel, has come to accept her dad's explanation. Finally, this student speaks about the way in which Vietnam haunts her. She senses that it is important and that we need to remember. In fact, the student's last comment seems to point toward what N. Bradley Christie argues is the most important reason to study the literature of the Vietnam War. He argues that "Teaching about the Vietnam War is not a matter of wanting to recall all the pain; it is a matter of needing to remember, of reaching through our pain to have students see themselves and their world more clearly" (1989, 37).

I think you can see that these students learned some important lessons about the war from studying this literature; yet, what each learned is as much, or perhaps more, a powerful affective response as it is intellectual. These few samples of student responses are a testament to the potential impact that the best literature of the Vietnam War can have on our students. These responses indicate that having out students study some of these works can help them better understand the war, their parents, and how the legacies of the war continue to have an impact on their lives.

Student Interest and Response

There are a number of reasons why students have such powerful responses to this literature. One important reason is that students are interested in learning about the war (Christie, 1989; Johannessen, 1990,

1992, & 1993; and Kroll, 1992). For example, strong evidence for this conclusion is that since 1989 a number of works dealing with the war have ranked in the top selections of Young Adults' Choices list in the International Reading Association's annual national survey of middle, junior high, and senior high school students (1989, 1990, 1991). In addition, at the college level, courses dealing with the Vietnam War are so popular that they have become staples of college curriculums (Johannessen, 1992; Kroll, 1992). My own experience is similar. I have taught various courses dealing with Vietnam War literature and usually these courses have been closed (or full) by the end of the first day of registration. Clearly, students want to know about the war, and, in part, it is their own interest in the subject that can provide an important first step toward enhancing their responses to this literature, or transforming their Hearts and Minds, and perhaps provide a link to the other literature we teach.

Unfortunately, our students come to us with very little real knowledge of the war, and what little they do know is full of distortions (Christie, 1989; McCloud, 1989; Johannessen, 1990,1992, & 1993). Research indicates that most students are not learning about the war in their history classes and very few students have ever read a serious work of literature that deals with the war in an English class on their own (Johannessen, 1992). What little they do know about the war does not go much beyond Hollywood's *Rambo* series, or the various adventure novels, such as the Saigon Commando or Night Fighter series, in which Vietnam is merely a backdrop (Johannessen, 1993, 43), or the romantic novels, such as those by Ellen Elliot, Della Field, and Evelyn Hawkins--all called *Vietnam Nurse*--that Kathleen M. Puhr says are "little more than Harlequin romances set in Vietnam" (1988, 74). The best example I have of students' lack of

knowledge and distortions about the war took place in the fall of 1988. If you will recall, during the summer of that year, the Olympics were held in Seoul, South Korea. One of my students came up to me after class one day to ask me a question. "I think I understand all this stuff were are reading in the literature," she said, "but what I can't understand is if we lost this war against the Vietnamese, how could we send our athletes there last summer for the Olympics?" Obviously, this young lady had confused Vietnam with South Korea.

Ironically, most of our students know more about the Civil War than they do about the war that was the defining experience for their parents' generation and continues to shape society and their lives. So, what we have are students who are interested in learning about the war, but who come to us knowing very little and what little they do know is full of distortions. Having our students study some of these works might go far toward helping them to evaluate the romanticized and distorted views that they have acquired from the media and elsewhere, and as I said before, help them gain a better understanding of the war, their parents, and how the legacies of the war continue to have an impact on society and their lives. Ultimately, studying these works may help students to deal more effectively with the world they will encounter outside of school, and, as Fred A. Wilcox argues, "empower [them] to take responsibility for issues that affect their lives and the future of our planet" (1988, 40).

Deciding What to Teach

Fortunately, our students' desire to learn more about the Vietnam War is matched by a diversity of engaging literature that deals with the war and

its aftermath. There are four main types of Young Adult Literature that have emerged in response to the Vietnam War: works that deal with the experience of Vietnam, or the combat narrative; literature that focuses on the war at home; novels that deal with the refugee experience; and works that focus on the legacies of the Vietnam War, particularly the impact of war on the children of the generation that came of age during the Vietnam War.

The next four pages of your handout (Appendix A, pp. 62-65) contain an annotated bibliography of the literature that deals with the war. The first part of the bibliography lists the Young-Adult literature that deals with the war, and the section lists some of the most important and teachable literature to come out of the war. Each entry contains full bibliographic information, a brief summary of the plot or contents, and sometimes key themes, any other information that may be important, and, in the case of Young Adult Literature, a recommended teaching level for the work.

The Vietnam Experience

The combat narrative is perhaps the best known type of war literature. A number of authors have written works that attempt to portray the experience of fighting in Vietnam. Like some of the texts we already teach (*The Red Badge of Courage, A Farewell to Arms, All Quiet on the Western Front*, and *Catch-22* among them), these works demand that students think about what it really meant to live and fight in this war. For example, Walter Dean Myers's novel *Fallen Angels* (1988) focuses on seventeen-year-old Richard Perry's tour of duty in Vietnam in 1967. Looking for a better life than he had in Harlem, Perry joins the Army and is sent to the war zone. Despite his loneliness, confusion, fear, and at times, his

guilt for having lived when his fellow soldiers have not, Perry survives and comes to trust and care deeply for several of his companions. They give him courage and a reason to live. Myers skillfully integrates the themes of innocence, courage, initiation, and mortality in this compelling novel. Readers will emerge feeling that they have experienced 'Nam.

Another combat narrative that has a great deal to offer young readers is Tim O'Brien's memoir, *If I Die in a Combat Zone* (1989). First published in 1973, this new-journalism style narrative is now regarded by some as one of the classics of the war. This is the story of one foot soldier's journey from safe, middle class America to the center of the nightmare of the Vietnam War. O'Brien emphasizes the fear and hardships faced by soldier's fighting the war. Readers are pulled along as O'Brien wrestles with the moral issues he faces. For example, O'Brien comes to Vietnam regarding Frederic Henry, the hero of Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, as one of his heroes. However, when O'Brien tries to apply Hemingway's definition of courage to his own situation, he has trouble making it work. In the end, he rejects Hemingway's definition and decides that true brave men are those who do well on the average and have perhaps a moment of glory. Readers learn what it was like to fight in Vietnam and, if taught in conjunction with other war literature, they clearly see how this literature is part of a literary heritage.

Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam (1986) edited by Bernard Edelman and *In the Combat Zone: An Oral History of American Women in Vietnam, 1966-1975* (1988) by Kathryn Marshall are two other adult books of interest to young adult readers. Edelman's book is a collection of letters home from those serving and working in Vietnam during the war. From soldiers to donut dollies (Red Cross workers), readers gain a clear sense of

what the war was like for those who lived it. Their letters show readers what the war was like for "cherries" (new soldiers in country), as well as what it was like on patrols in the "bush." There are letters from wounded soldiers and those who cared for them that explore the physical, mental, and spiritual wounds of the war. Finally, readers find themselves rejoicing with those who made it home, agonizing with those who were prisoners of war in North Vietnam, and weeping for those who never made it.

In recent years more and more women are telling what the war was like for them, and Marshall's oral history is certainly one of the best and most accessible for teenage readers. Based on Marshall's interviews with twenty women who served in Vietnam, the work delves into their motives for going to Vietnam, their experiences, and the impact that the war has had on their lives. These women include army nurses, Red Cross workers, and civilians living in Saigon. Readers are struck by the idealism that led many of these women to go to Vietnam and the dramatic impact that the war has had on their lives.

Having our students study one of these combat narratives that portray the war as it really was may go far toward helping them to reevaluate the romanticized views that they have acquired from the media and elsewhere.

The War at Home

As the war in Vietnam escalated, so did the fragmentations and polarization of people at home. Unfortunately, our students have very little knowledge of the events that took place at home during the Vietnam era. Adolescent fiction writers have responded to this need with some excellent offerings that examine the effects of the war on the homefront. Meg

Wolitzer's novel *Caribou* (1986) takes place in 1970 and focuses on eleven-year-old Becca Silverman. The family, including her nineteen-year-old brother, Stevie, gather around the television set to watch the draft lottery. When Steve's birthdate is drawn first, the family's orderly life is plunged into tension and disorder. Eventually, Steve flees to Canada to avoid the draft, and Becca's father can't forgive him. Becca also speaks out against the war as she comes to understand herself and others as well.

Bob Greene's oral history *Homecoming: When the Soldiers Returned from Vietnam* (1990) is an adult book that is very appropriate for young adult readers. This book is a collection of letters by Vietnam veterans who wrote to author and syndicated columnist Greene in response to a question he asked his readers in his column. Greene had heard stories that Vietnam veterans claimed that when they came home from the war they were spat upon by people at home. He asked veterans to write him and tell him if the stories he had heard are true. Greene received hundreds of letters from veterans in response to his query which he collected in his book. The result is a work that examines the collision between the war in Asia and the war the veterans faced on American soil when they came home.

Far too many of our students seem willing to believe the myth that because the Vietnam War was fought far away from the shores of America, it had little or no impact at home. Having our students study one of these works may help them understand some of the ways that the Vietnam War has touched everyone.

Legacies I: The Refugee Experience

Since the fall of the Saigon government to the Communists in April 1975, more than two million Vietnamese people have fled Vietnam. More than a million of these "boat people" have immigrated to the United States. Our increasingly multi-cultural classrooms are filled with Southeast Asian students who are part of this still continuing refugee experience. A number of adolescent fiction writers have written about this experience. In *A Boat to Nowhere* (1981), Maureen Crane Wartski does an admirable job of describing some of the many hardships and dangers some of the first "boat people" confronted in trying to escape from Vietnam. This novel details the adventures of Thay Van Chi, his family, and an orphan boy, Kien, during their escape from Vietnam. Kien suddenly appears in a tiny fishing village. Thay protects the orphan whose parents were killed in the war. When the Vietcong arrive in the village, Kien uses his survival skills to help the family escape in a fishing boat. Once at sea, they are attacked by Thai pirates, receive a hostile reception in a coastal village in Thailand, are betrayed by other refugees at Outcast Island, and are rejected by the crew of an American tanker. Eventually, the family and Kien are rescued by an American freighter with sailors sympathetic to their plight.

Jamie Gilson's *Hello, My Name Is Scrambled Eggs* (1988) examines some of the difficulties refugees experience once they reach the United States. This novel centers on Tuan Nguyen who is a Vietnamese refugee who arrives in America to live with the Trumble family in a small town in the midwest. Harvey Trumble is a seventh grader who tries to mold Tuan into an "American kid." Tuan has many difficulties adjusting, and conflicts develop between Tuan and Harvey. Ultimately, the boys become friends, and they both learn and grow as a result of their experiences.

In studying one of these works, students learn important lessons about the Vietnam War and its aftermath; and, in light of our multi-cultural classrooms, students may also learn some important cultural lessons about their fellow students. In fact, Norma H. Mandel (1988) reports that when she had one of her multi-cultural high school English classes read Wartski's *A Boat to Nowhere*, she was able to foster a very positive exchange of cultural information and personal feelings among her students that until she taught the novel had been suppressed (40).

Legacies II: The Next Generation

Since the mid-1980's, the nation has at last been willing to remember the experience of Vietnam. Memorials to Vietnam veterans have been built, ticker-tape parades to honor Vietnam veterans have been held throughout the country, popular films dealing with the war have been released, and popular books about the war have been published. Despite our willingness to remember the war, we have not been so willing to consider some of the many legacies of the war. An obvious example is the fact that Vietnam veterans account for more than one-third of all homeless people in America. This is an astonishing statistic, and what is even more astonishing is that few seem willing to address this issue. However, a number of authors of Young Adult literature have addressed this problem and other legacies of the Vietnam War. Mary Downing Hahn tackles the homeless veterans issue in her novel *December Stillness* (1990). Kelly McAllister is thirteen years old and bored with the routine of school when she encounters Mr. Weems, a traumatized, homeless Vietnam War veteran. Despite warnings from her family and friends, Kelly attempts to befriend Weems. In the process of

helping him. Kelly grows emotionally and acquires social awareness and responsiblity.

A number of novels attempt to deal with the impact of the war on the family, particularly on the children of those who served in Vietnam. Premier among these works is Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country* (1989). Shortly after graduating from high school, Samatha Hughes, the protagonist of Mason's novel, at last confronts Vietnam. Her father was killed there before she was born. Sam's Uncle Emmett, with whom she lives, returned from the war, but he has never been able to hold a job, start a family or adjust to the mainstream of American life. Sam suspects that his headaches and skin rash are symptoms of Agent Orange. She queries the adults around her for answers about the war and her father. Her quest culminates in a trip from her small town in Kentucky to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D. C. Sam is united with her father, Emmett, and herself in a moving final scene at the Memorial.

While *In Country* (1989) ends at "the Wall," *Park's Quest* by Katherine Patterson (1989) begins there. The Memorial sustains Park's search to learn about his father who was killed in Vietnam. The summer after "the Wall" is dedicated, Park travels to his grandfather's farm to learn more about his father. What he finds is a Vietnamese-American girl named Thanh. She is a survivor of war and the refugee camps. She is tough and fears that Park may disrupt the family and the good life she and her mother have found in America. As the plot unfolds, Park learns that Thanh may be his half-sister, and they both discover that they have more in common than reasons to fear and distrust one another. The novel gives readers a second generation to help heal the wounds of the war

Larry Bograd's *Traveler's* (1986) is another offering that focuses on children who lost parents in the war. In this novel, a high school students is haunted by the image of a father he never knew. When the boy tries to find out more about him from adults, they avoid his questions. Ultimately, the teenager learns about his father, the war, and how much pain the war has caused his family and others in the community.

Kathryn Jensen's *Pocket Change* (1990) focuses on the devastating effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder on veterans and their families. Young Josie's life begins to crumble when her father's increasingly erratic and violent behavior threatens the family. In trying to help him, Josie pieces together clues from his past and becomes convinced that his strange behavior is the result of experiences in the Vietnam War that still haunt him. When she confronts him with her suspicions, the result is a chilling climax that leads to a satisfying ending. Readers see how this legacy of the war continues to haunt veterans and their families.

One book that deals directly with the many lessons of the Vietnam War is Bill McCloud's *What Should We Tell Our Children about Vietnam?* (1989). McCloud is a Vietnam veteran and a junior high school social studies teacher. He wondered what to tell his students about Vietnam. He wrote to the people who directed, fought, and protested the war: soldiers, anti-war protesters, politicians, writers, and journalists. McCloud asked them what he should tell his students. The book is a collection of 128 of the letters he received. They form a remarkable and very readable historical record. The book contains letters from the likes of McGeorge Bundy, Jimmy Carter, Clark Clifford, Barry Goldwater, Tom Hayden, John Hersey, Henry Kissinger, Timothy Leary, Country Joe McDonald, Dean Rusk, Oliver Stone, Kurt Vonnegut, and William Westmoreland.

Having our students read one or more of these works that deal with the aftermath of the war will help them to understand some of the legacies of the Vietnam War, and perhaps begin the process of healing the wounds of the war.

Some Important and Teachable Vietnam War Literature

The last section of the annotated bibliography contains some of the most important and teachable literature of the Vietnam War. Most of these works are combat narratives, the first type of literature I talked about. These works demand that students think about what it really meant to live and fight in this war.

A number of important autobiographies have come out of the war. For example, Ron Kovic's, *Born on the Fourth of July* (1977), is a very important and teachable work. Kovic describes his idealistic enlistment in the Marines, his service in Vietnam, his painful return home in a wheelchair, his treatment at the hands of the Veterans Administration, and his involvement in the antiwar movement.

Another important autobiography is Lynda Van Devanter's, *Home Before Morning: The Story of an Army Nurse in Vietnam* (1983). This is a powerful narrative in which the author describes her tour of duty in Vietnam, how she lost her idealism, the problems she had had when she returned home, including being treated as "a murderer rather than a healer," and her experiences with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder).

I have also listed important novels such as Tim O'Brien's recent *The Things They Carried* (1990). This novel is a series of fictional episodes in which the narrator and characters describe and reflect on what happened to

them in Vietnam and twenty years later. The book explores the human heart and reflects on the terrible weight of those things people carry through their lives. I know two secondary teachers who have had a great deal of success with this novel.

Another important and teachable novel is James Webb's *Fields of Fire* (1978). In this realistic novel, the author focuses on a Marine unit and follows them as they fight the enemy, endure unbelievable living conditions. Webb examines the reasons each man became a Marine and explores the difficulties veterans faced when they returned home.

Having our students study one of these important works gives them an opportunity to study the best literature to come out of the war, and may also help them understand some of the ways that the war has touched everyone.

Teaching the Literature of the Vietnam War

How we go about teaching the war, the literature of the Vietnam War, is extremely important. As Kroll (1992) indicates, the excitement of teaching the literature of the Veitnam War--the outstanding responses students produce--comes about because students are "engaged by [the] topic" and "encouraged" or taught "to inquire into it." The instructional approaches I will be discussing are approaches that encourage engagement and critical inquiry.

The Vietnam Experience

If you will turn to the next page of your handout (Appendix B, p. 67), I'll show you one way you might think about organizing instruction to teach the combat narrative of the Vietnam War. Literature that focuses on the Vietnam War has tremendous appeal to young people. Besides the fact that young people want to learn more about the Vietnam War, one reason for this may be that one of the most compelling ways in which this literature speaks to students is through the voice of the narrator. Another reason may be that much of this literature focuses on the adolescent experience (Johannessen 1992, 7, & 1993, 48).

Take the case of the combat narrative: at first glance this type of work might appear to be very far removed from the experience of most teenagers. However, Jacqueline E. Lawson (1988) points out that most scholars now recognize that Vietnam was "our nation's first teen-age war." The average age of the American combatant in Vietnam was nineteen years as compared with twenty-six years for the soldier in World War II (26). As a result, many of the combat narratives of the Vietnam War, unlike those from World War II, focus on the adolescent experience--that of naive youths who are transformed by their experiences--viewed through the eyes of someone not much older than most high school students. In other words, in many ways this literature seems to students to speak with the voice of someone much like themselves, exploring some of the same kinds of struggles they are facing. For example, the narrator and main character of Myers' Fallen Angels is seventeen-year-old Richard Perry. As with our own students, one of his concerns is to determine what it means to be a friend, to really care deeply about another human being. As Richie Perry confronts

this issue, he and another soldier, Peewee, find themselves cut off from their platoon and surrounded by Vietcong. It is night. They are both terrified, and as they decide what they will do and prepare for an expected attack by the enemy, Peewee reaches out and puts his hand on Richie's wrist. Richie asks Peewee what is wrong.

> "Nothing," he whispered back.
>
> He kept his hand on my wrist. I moved my hand and took his. We held hands in the darkness. (1988, 285)

This moving scene, told from the viewpoint of seventeen-year-old Richie, represents Richie's final step in understanding what it means to be someone's friend. They are caught in the absolute worst of circumstances, and in this situation they reach out to help and comfort one another. In terms of the combat narrative, this is certainly the theme of brotherhood in war, but for our teenage students this is an important lesson in friendship--a lesson that is taught to them not by a twenty-six year-old adult soldier landing on the beach at Normandy in World War II, but rather by another teenager who is fighting in a confusing jungle war, which seems to be much like their own confusing world.

Many of the combat narratives follow the contours of the narrative of education or *Bildungsroman,* at the heart of which is the one year (or thirteen months in the case of Marines) tour of duty in Vietnam (Herzog, 1992; Lawson, 1988; Johannessen, 1992).

The narrative of educaton, or the process of becoming what one literary scholar describes as an "old kid" (Lawson, 1988) occurs in five or six stages, which provide the infrastructure for these narratives. As the

handout indicates, these stages are: (1) the mystique of pre-induction; (2) the initiation into military culture in boot camp; (3) the dislocation of arrival in Vietnam; (4) the confrontation with mortality in the first firefight; (5) experience and consideration; and (6) the phenomenon of coming home, or as Mark Baker describes it, "nineteen-year-old bodies with thirty-five-year-old minds" (1981, 130).

This narrative structure suggests an overall approach to teaching this literature. It suggests logicial ways to make reading assignments, to organize class discussions and other activities, and to explore important thematic and structural elements with students. The sheet that I am giving you contains key questions for study and discussing each of these stages, and depending on the particular work, I have included questions that focus on structure, literary style, and literary techniques. I think you can see that this provides the basis for an overall plan for teaching literature that focuses on the adolescent experience in combat literature of the Vietnam War.

Follow-up Writing

If you will look at the next page of your handout (p. 68), you will see that I have provided you with four writing assignments that work with many of the combat narratives listed in the bibliography. Most of these assignments follow directly from the instruction, the overall approach that I have shown you.

The first assignment is analytical and asks students to interpret what the author wants readers to understand about the Vietnam War. (Read assignment.) The assignment follows directly from key questions on the previous page of your handout involving the central meaning of the work.

The second assignment focuses on character analysis and asks students to explain how the protagonist changes as a result of his or her experiences in the war. (Read assignment.) If you are interested, you might want to take a look at my book, *Illumination rounds: Teaching the Literature of the Vietnam War* (Urbana: NCTE, 1992), which contains a whole series of activities designed to prepare students for this assignment. The second student response for James Webb's *Fields of Fire* was written in response to this assignment.

The third assignment combines some analysis with personal responses. (Read.) It asks students to think about what they have learned about the war as a result of reading a particular work.

The last assignment is also personal response. (Read.) It asks students to think about some of the themes and issues in the work that are still with us today and to consider what can be done to heal the wounds of war.

Obviously, these assignments are only meant as suggestions for some different ways to get students to think about and respond to these works. Besides the two novels I have already mentioned, nearly all of the combat narratives I discussed earlier, and those listed in the "Annotated Bibliography" that I did not discuss might be taught using this approach. The important point is that combining appropriate and engaging instruction with literature that is of interest to students, results in high levels of student involvement, and thoughtful and insightful student responses. One high school teacher I know who regularly teaches the literature of the Vietnam War reports that her students' responses to Vietnam War literature is "nothing short of electric" (Carter, 1991).

Teaching Nonfiction Combat Narratives of the Vietnam War

As I previously stated, young people are drawn to the combat narratives of the war because of the voice of the narrator and the nature of the experience that is the focus of many of these works. This is particularly true for many of the personal narratives, collected letters, and oral histories. In fact, one of the real strengths of this type of literature is that it is accessible to nearly all students. The speakers of these works establish a confidential, intimate relationship with the reader, in a voice that seems to be speaking directly to them. In addition, the voice of these works is one which contains the persuasive power of truth telling that only an eyewitness can claim (Lawson, 1988).

And again, the heart of these works is the adolescent experience. In addition, because of their youth, many of these young people were not mentally prepared for the carnage and terror that marked the Vietnam experience. As a result, in writing about their experiences, these young people speak of the idealism, loneliness, homesickness, fear, terror, feelings of isolation and abandonment, and of betrayal in ways that speak directly to our students.

My own students speak of their fascination with these works and how much the speakers seem just like them. In fact, oral historian Mark Baker, author of *Nam*, probably best describes the typical student reaction to these works when he recounts his own reaction to interviewing veterans for his oral history:

> There was an aura about the people who were over there. These guys were kids, but they weren't kids. There was

> something in their eyes that made them absolutely different. I was fascinated, mesmerized by these guys. I couldn't take my eyes of them. There was something very old about them, but I still felt like a kid. (1981, 62)

Again, many of the nonfiction works of the war follow the contours of the narrative of education or *Bildungsroman,* at the heart of which is the year-long tour of duty (Lawson, 1988). This overall structure is enhanced by each veteran's desire to tell his story and the need to understand what, exactly happened to him or her, or to explain, in absolute terms, the effect of having, as Philip Caputo says in his memoir, *A Rumor of War,* "a lifetime of experience compressed into a year and a half" (1977, 4).

If you'll turn to the next two pages of your handout (Appendix B, pp. 69-71), I'll show one way you might set up instruction based on the narrative of education to teach Mark Baker's oral History *Nam: The Vietnam War in the Words of the Men and Women Who Fought There* (1981), and this same approach works with many other nonfiction narratives of the war.

I begin the work by assigning students to read the "introduction" and the first section of the work titled, "Initiation: Ask Not." After students have read these sections, I lead a class discussion using the "Discussion Questions" in your handout (p. 69). You might also use these questions as a study guide or you might want to have students answer them in small groups before leading a whole class discussion of their responses. What is important about the questions is that they get at the specifics of the of the first two stages of the overall structure of the narrative of education I just described to you, the mystique of pre-induction and the initiation into boot camp. For example, question #5 focuses on the mystique of pre-induction. Some of the

speakers talk about President John F. Kennedy's famous line: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can for your country" as the call that inspired them to go into the military.

After I take students through the first part of the work, I assign them to read the rest of it. Then, I give them the "Small Group Assigment" you see in your handout (Appendix B, p. 70). (Read directions.) As the directions indicate, I assign students to small groups to report to the class on a particular section of the book. The groups have a set of generic questions that are, in part, designed to help students understand the themes and structure in their assigned section.

I give students class time to work on their oral presentations and then they give their presentations in the order they are listed on the sheet. As the groups take the class through their assigned sections, students begin to formulate conclusions about the war and the nature of the Vietnam experience. For example, one issue that students always want to discuss is the cumulative effect of the war on the young people who went to Vietnam. They see how idealistic youths, motivated perhaps by Kennedy's famous call, are transformed by the war. They see how these young people lost their innocence and returned home as "old kids" or as Baker describes, "Nineteen-year-old bodies with thirty-five-year-old minds" (1981, 130).

Other questions on the assignment sheet have a very different purpose. For example, sometimes these works have such an emotional impact on students that it is important to examine how they achieve their emotional power. Question #9, then, is designed to help students think about their initial responses. In addition, there are also questions that ask students to consider the author's arrangement of materials, and how the work may or may not contribute to the historical record.

The Writing Connection

The next page of your handout (Appendix B, p. 71) contains the follow up writing assignments I have used with this work. Once again, I have provided you with a variety of kinds of writing assignments that you might want to use.

The first assignment is an analytical assignment in which students must write about the stages of the Vietnam experience or narrative of education. (Read assignment.) I think you can see how this assignment follows directly from the work students have done in their small groups and class discussions of their findings. Because oral histories tend to be direct than fictional works, many students do quite well with this type of analytical assignment. Often, their success with this assignment translates into more effective analytical essays about more complex literature we study later on.

The focus of the second assignment is directly related to some of the questions from their small group assignment sheet and is important for some other reasons as well. For example, one of the questions that sometimes comes up in class, and sometimes comes from parents is, "Why are you reading oral history in English class?" (Read assignment.) As you can see, this analytical assignment asks students to consider the work as a work of literature and/or history. It allows students considerable freedom to answer the question. I have had some interesting, insightful, and unusual papers from students.

The third assignment is also analytical and follows directly from students' work in their small groups. (Read assignment.) While many students write about the aspect of the Vietnam experience that they worked

on in their small groups, some end up writing about an aspect of the Vietnam experience that they were particularly interested in or were inspired to examine because of what other small groups have presented.

The fourth assignment asks students to do some original research, and, as you will see, it too follows directly from the work students have previously done on *Nam*. (Read assignment.) With this assignment, students must utilize the knowledge they have gained in reading the work and apply it to the real world. This kind of assignment has tremendous appeal for students. Many teachers who have had their students do oral history projects like the assignment described here report that the results are almost always beyond what they had expected (Carter, 1989 & 1991, Oldham, 1986).

Finally, the fifth assignment involves personal response. (Read assignment.) In this instance, students are asked to write about a traumatic experience that, like the experiences described by veterans, made them old before their time. In doing this assignment, students often write about having to deal with the loss of a loved one, or, in many cases, write about having to deal with a moral issue involving right and wrong.

An important point to keep in mind about the writing assignments I have shown you is that all of them have their roots in the activities, the instruction, that preceeds them. These are not assignments for the sake of giving assignments. They are designed to enable students to use and extend the knowledge they have gained in studying the work. They are designed to connect reading and writing (something that we do all too rarely in our English classes) and encourage inquiry, the different kinds of inquiry Kroll talks about in his book.

Besides Baker's work there are a number of other oral histories and personal narratives, you might want to try using the approach I have described. Some of the works will require some modifications, but most can be taught using the overall approach I have described. Listed in the "Annotated Bibliography," (Appendix A, pp. 62-65) are some of the nonfiction works that work well with this approach: Philip Caputo's, *A Rumor of War*, Ron Kovic's, *Born on the Fourth of July*, Michael Herr's, *Dispatches*, Tim O'Brien's, *If I Die in a Combat Zone*, Kathryn Marshall's, *In the Combat Zone: An Oral History of American Women in Vietnam*, and Lynda Van Devanter's, *Home Before Morning: The Story of an Army Nurse in Vietnam*.

Teaching The Vietnam War: Two Short Stories

Hollywood is at least partly responsible for students' interest in the war. The *Rambo* films and television shows such as *China Beach* have had a great deal to do with sparking their interest. Unfortunately, too many youngsters seem to be caught up in what I call the China Beach Party images and Rambesque shoot'em-up myths of Hollywood's Vietnam. Since the war is rarely dealt with in most secondary school curricula, their myths and images have not been challenged. Therefore, the next activity I would like to show you and the short stories that go along with it utlilize students' interest in and their ideas and opinions about the Vietnam War. (The short stories discussed in this section are not included with this paper.) In addition, this approach is derived from the overall approach to teaching combat narratives of the war that I described to you earlier. These particular short stories focus on one important aspect of that experience.

Individual works many emphasize one particular aspect of the Vietnam experience over another. When this is case, you may want to focus more attention on that aspect of the experience. So, this instruction is designed to illustrate one way you might explore a particular aspect of the Vietnam experience in considerable depth.

"Thinking about the Vietnam War" Opinionnaire

If you will turn to the next page of your handout (Appendix B, p. 72), I'd like to show you how this activity works in the classroom and how this type of activity engages students in the literature they are about to read, prepares them for problems they will encounter in their reading, and helps prepare students for writing. The "Thinking about the Vietnam War" opinionnaire is designed to be used not just with the two stories (stories are not included with this paper) that follow the opinionnaire in your handout but with any number of works dealing with the Vietnam War. The point is that this kind of activity is very versitile. Add a couple of statements and it can be used to introduce any number of short works dealing with the same themes or a longer work or an unit or course.

The two stories following the "Vietnam War Opinionnaire" (not included in this paper), "Centurion" by Tim O'Brien (from *If I Die in a Combat Zone* [Dell, 1987]) and "We Have Met the Enemy" by Robin Moore (from *Combat Pay* [Manor Books, 1977]) speak to the media-molded myths and images of youth concerning the Vietnam War. Both stories suggest the madness of a war in which decent men must confront the inescapable brutality of war. In O'Brien's story, students discover that brutality is the inescapable outcome when a raid on a village turns up an enemy weapon but

no visible enemy. In Moore's story, they see how acts of self-preservation can result in brutality. Both stories make clear that the realities of the Vietnam War are far different from Hollywood's romantized and glorified versions. They suggest to students the dangers of believing in these images and myths.

How Students See War

This opinionnaire utilizes students' ideas and opinions about the Vietnam War. It allows students varying degrees of agreement or disagreement with each statement. A number of statements on the opinionnaire are keyed to ideas and themes students will encounter in their reading.

Before students read the stories I have them fill out the opinionnaire on their own. Then, I compile the results on the board, but to keep this step simple, I merely ask for students who agreed and strongly agreed to raise their hands and then for students who disagreed or strongly disagreed to raise their hands for each statement. Then, beginning with the statements for which there is the most disagreement, I lead a class discussion that focuses on students' responses to each statement. I encourage students to explain the reasoning behind their responses and to debate differing opinions. Since the statements on the opinionnaire require students to take a stand, a lively discussion invariably ensues.

An interesting modification of the procedures I have described is to have students meet in small groups after completing the opinionnaire on their own and have them try to reach a consensus on their responses before the whole class discussion.

The disagreement over the statements that is created in the classroom is an important factor in interesting or engaging students in the literature. At the end of the discussion of the opinionnaire, the teacher might use the disagreement with a statement like, "I see that we have considerable disagreement over statements #3 and #9 (read statements). Let's read these two stories and find out which viewpoint is correct." Students are motivated to read because they want to find out if their view of Rambo is correct.

A second purpose of the opinionnaire and the follow-up discussion is to create interest in the characters and and themes in the stories students are about to read. Items #12 and #13 (read statements), for example, relate to one aspect of the problem faced by the narrator of "Centurion." The officers in his unit randomly pull three old men out of a hut, tie them up, gag them, and then tie them to saplings in the center of the unit's perimeter, using the logic that the enemy guerrillas will not attack that night because they have taken their fathers prisoner. The narrator feels compassion for the old men. He thinks they may be innocent and knows that in the morning they will be tortured for information about the enemy. Yet, he does almost nothing to help them. He seems to be unable to do anything significant about the brutality of the incident, accepting it as the price of survival in a crazy war.

Student responses to the items on the opinionnaire usually indicate that many of them believe that a person can do the right thing, not harm innocent civilians, and still survive in war. O'Brien suggests that in the Vietnam War, morality and compassion for innocent civilians may have to take a back seat when survival is at stake. Through the discussion, not just deciding if they agree or disagree with these statements on the opinionnaire,

students begin to question some of their initial responses and are motivated to find out how characters will deal with these issues in the stories.

One way that the activity helps students begin to understand what the authors of the stories want them to understand about the Vietnam War is related to the sterotyped views students have about war. Many students have an oversimplified good-guys-against-the-bad-guys image of the war. In the discussion of the opinionnaire, students are often surprised to discover that some of their peers do not find the Rambo image accurate or desirable. In addition, in discussing statement #10, "The Soldier above all other people, prays for peace, for he must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war," some student inevitably wonders, "This is in quotes, who said it?" If no one in the class knows, I reveal that the statement was made by General Douglas MacArthur, one of America's greatest generals. Students are very surprised by this, and as we discuss why MacArthur might have made such a statement, students begin to wonder if war is as romantic as the images and myths of Hollywood's version of the Vietnam War. These statements, and others on the opinionnaire, help students come to the literature with a framework or context that will better enable them to understand the stories they are about to read. They don't need a history of the Vietnam War.

One other interesting aspect of how the opinionnaire works, how it gets students to think and begin to question some of their initial responses, involves the way some of the statements are set up. In marking their answers, students, without realizing it, often contradict themselves. For example, it is not uncommon for a student to agree with statements #13 and #7 (read statements). As the discussion develops, however, students often realize (on their own or as a result of their peers pointing it out) that they

have a contradiction in thought. It is not uncommon for one students to tell another, "How can you say it is never right to kill another person when you just got through saying that when your own survival is at stake, you can't worry about harming or killing innocent civilians." These statements encourage disagreement or discussion and get students thinking about the issues and themes in the stories.

After discussing most or all of the statements on the opinionnaire, have students read the two stories. Then divide the class into small, mixed groups and, using the "Discussion Questions for 'Centurion' and 'We Have Met the Enemy'," the next page of your handout (Appendix B, p. 73), ask them to determine from evidence in the stories how the narrator and Bates would have reacted had they been in the situation Hucks and Leland were confronted with in "We Have Met the Enemy" and how Hucks and Leland would have reacted had they been in the situation narrator and Bates faced in "Centurion."

Dealing with Irony

Once students have come up with their conclusions, evidence, and explanations, I have the class reassemble to discuss their findings. As the groups begin reporting their answers, students are surprised to discover that it would not have made any difference. Most agree that Moore's characters, like O'Brien's, would have done little to help the old men, and that O'Brien's characters probably would have killed the shadowy figure that ran into a cave behind their position and turned out to be a young Vietname girl. Once students understand that these different characters probably would have

reacted the same in either situation, they are prepared to deal with the irony and what the authors are telling us about the Vietnam War.

As we discuss their responses, students begin to formulate important conclusions about the stories. They realize, for example, that O'Brien is not criticizing the narrator of his story for doing very little to help the old men who are tortured. They see the irony of his situation--had the patrol not taken the three old men prisoner, they probably would have been attacked by the enemy. Students recognize the lack of choices in such a situation; the patrol takes the old men prisoner and tortures them because, as Bates tells the narrator, "This is war, my friend. You don't find a weapon and just walk away." Students perceive that O'Brien is really telling us that, even for those with a strong sense of right and wrong, cruely and brutality are inevitable outcomes of war. In addition, they realize that O'Brien echoes the comment Philip Caputo makes in his, *A Rumor of War*, when he leaves Vietnam: "We had done nothing more than endure," he writes. "We had survived, and that was our only victory."

Following this discussion, I often ask students to refer back to the opinionnaire and to circle the responses to the statements as they think O'Brien and Moore would circle them and to compare their responses in light of their observations about the stories. Then I hold a whole class discussion. Usually, for example, there is nearly unanimous agreement that O'Brien and Moore would find the Rambo image undesirable. Even though there is considerable agreement as to how O'Brien and Moore would respond to many of the statements, there is usually some disagreement about a few of them. For example, some students argue that certainly O'Brien and perhaps Moore as well would strongly disagree with statement #3, "For soldiers who served in Vietnam, the difference between death and survival often meant not

worrying about potential harm to innocent civilians or doing the right or moral thing." They note, however, that even though the narrator in O'Brien's story does what he has to do to survive, he still "worries" about doing the right or moral thing and tries to do something. This shows, they argue, that O'Brien wants us to understand that soldiers can't simply abandon morality in war. They have to take it into account. Pretty insightful.

Very often student opinions have undergone a transformation as a result of their study of the stories. One young man made this comment: "In this one movie Vietnam looked like it would be fun and exciting, but in these stories it's awful!" Students begin to see the impact that the literature has had on them.

Follow-up Writing

If you will look at the next page of your handout, "Vietnam War Writing Assignments (Appendix B, p. 74)," I'll describe some of the assignments I have used with this opinionnaire and these short stories and how it encourages effective writing or responses.

Keep in mind what has taken place so far. The discussion of the statements on the opinionnaire prior to reading that establishes the context, or helps to prepare students for interpreting the stories, and engages them in the characters and themes. Then after reading the stories, students discussed how the characters in the stories would have reacted in the situations presented in the other stories. Then students discussed what the authors probably would have said about the statements on the opinionnaire. Finally, they discussed how their own responses have or have not changed as a result of having studied the two stories.

The disagreement over what the authors probably would have said about the statements provides a natural follow-up writing situation, assignment #1. (Read Assignment.) Students are motivated in this writing situation because it is real. They are writing to a real audience--their peers! It follows directly out of what they have done in the class discussions, so they have rehersed arguments, presented evidence and reasoning to support their interpretations, and heard refutations of their viewpoints. They are ready to write. And they have a reason to write--to convince their peers to change their conclusions. This is literary analysis as it should be.

Another possible follow-up writing activity is to have students read on their own another story that involves the Vietnam War and that uses irony to convey its meaning. This is assignment #2 and the story that follows the assignments, Charles Coe's "Young Man in Vietnam" (story is not included in this paper), is one that I have used for this assignment a number of times. I have students read the story on their own and then write an interpretation of it. Again, I have had good success with this assignment. I believe it is because the pre-reading activity and the follow-up discussions model for students how to interpret this literature and how to turn their interpretations into written analytical essays. They gain confidence from their participation in the sequence of discussion activities I went over.

Assignment #3 follows directly from the class discussion of how students' opinions have or have not changed as a result of reading the story. (Read assignment.) This assignment is both a personal response and involves some literary analysis. Students have success with this assignment because they have thought about and discussed their opinions before reading and after reading the story, and they are able to explain how their opinions have changed as a result of reading the story. Without the

opinionnaire activity before reading the story that requires them to articulate and defend their opinions, their written responses are not very good.

Assignment #4 is a creative assignment. (Read assignment.) Students usually have little difficulty with this assignment because in essence they have discussed this thoroughly in the follow-up discussion of the stories. In fact, in that discussion students often discuss various scenarios regarding how the characters probably would have acted. In short, they usually have plenty of ideas for writing. In addition, many often are anxious to show how they believe the characters would have acted based on their interpretations of the story. Last spring one of my student teachers had her eleventh grade classes do this assignment, and in one student's new scene in "We Have Met the Enemy," Bates and the narrator kill the shadowy figure they see run into the cave behind their position. When they realize they have killed a young Vietnamese girl, the narrator begins agonizing over what he has done. Bates turns to him and echoing what he said in "Centurion," says, "This is war, my friend. You don't let a shadowy figure move behind your position when you're in a fire fight and just walk away."

Assignment #5 is a personal response to the story. (Read assignment.) It follows directly from the discussions prior to and after reading and discussing the story. In these discussions student are rehersing what they are going to be asked to do in writing.

I have used this opinionnaire to introduce a number of works dealing with the Vietnam War: Besides the short stories I have shown you here today and Philip Caputo's, *A Rumor of War*, that I mentioned earlier, I have used it with James Webb's, *Fields of Fire*, Walter Dean Myer's, *Fallen Angels*, Ron Kovic's, *Born on the Fourth of July*; Mark Baker's oral history *Nam*,

Michael Herr's, *Dispatches*, Bobby Ann Mason's, *In Country*; and Tim O'Brien's, *Going after Cacciato*.

Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam: Documentary Film

The next two pages of your handout (Appendix B, pp. 75-76) contain a student activity sheet and writing assignment for a powerful documentary film that I have often used to explore the Vietnam experience. In all of the years I have taught the literature of the Vietnam War to my high school and college students nothing has had quite the impact as the excellent documentary film *Dear America: Letters Home From Vietnam*. In fact, in my discussions with other teachers who have used this and other films in their units and courses, there is general agreement that this film is one of the anchors. They might change many other things in their units and courses, but this film is one of the mainstays.

Directed by Bill Couturie and produced by the Couturie Company and Vietnam Veterans Ensemble Theater Company, the film stands out as perhaps the best documentary on the Vietnam War. It is based on a book of veterans letters home and was originally an HBO cable-TV special that won so much praise it was released and shown in theaters around the country.

The film is so powerful that teaching it demands special handling. The first time I used the film I tried to have a discussion as soon as the film was over. I quickly discovered that my students were so moved that they were unable to speak. One young lady tried and immediately burst into tears and ran out of the classroom. Now, I move slowly and carefully. Another problem I have had with the film is that it is so powerful that it is

sometimes difficult to get students to think critically. This activity attempts to help students be thoughtful about what they view.

Ideally, the film should be shown from beginning to end without interruption. Unfortunately, it is too long to be done in a single class period. At 84 minutes, it is difficult to squeeze it into two class periods if there is anything else going on. However, if the teacher is unable to show it in its entirety, I recommend squeezing it into two days. Give a very brief introduction on the first day and move into the film. Stop near the end of the period and answer any questions students might have. On the second day, I suggest backing the film up a bit so that it runs to nearly the end of the period. Then show the rest of the film to the end. I suggest running the credits at the end instead of cutting it off to have a discussion. Tell students that the class will discuss the film the following day. Let students come down from the emotional impact of the film. My experience has been that students will sit quietly when the film is over.

On the following day with secondary students, I hand out the activity sheet "Some Themes from *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam*" (p. 75). Although you could have students do the sheet individually, it usually works best in small groups of three to five. The sheet is designed to help students identify themes and quotations from letters that support the themes. I usually do the first one with the class so that everyone understands what to do. (Read and go over first one.) I explain that for theme 4 they are to decide what theme the quotations suggest and think of two additional quotations that would go along with the two I have provided. For theme 5 they are to think of another theme or issue from the film that they think is important and also think of at least two quotations that support it.

With high school students, once they have completed the activity sheet, I assemble the class to discuss their findings. As the groups report and we discuss their answers, students begin to understand some of the themes and issues presented in the film. The most interesting part of the discussion comes with themes 4 and 5. Although other themes and issues are possible for theme 4, students often come up with something like "the daily life of the soldier was boring, physically and emotionally exhausting and dangerous with moments of absolute terror." For the theme and evidence they must do on their own (theme 5), students generate evidence for themes such as "soldiers killed to survive and find some meaning in the experience"; or, "winning medals for heroism became meaningless"; or "those at home seemed not to understand what the war was really like"; or, "politicans and generals use the language of winning, while we are actually losing the war." Then, I turn this discussion to the images presented in the film.

With college classes I do not do the activity sheet, but rather lead a class discussion of the film. We focus on the themes and images (the same ideas on the activity sheet), and I encourage them to identify images and themes that support what they see as the main points of the film. I also ask for their personal responses: What struck you the most? How did you feel? As we discuss their responses, I am always struck by the depth of responses. Some students are moved by how young and innocent the soldiers all looked when they first arrived and how they changed into hardened killers. Others are angry at how blind people were back in the United States to the reality of the war. Others are struck by the insanity of the war. Most of them can recall and describe specific images from the film to support their responses.

Next, I have students write on one of the topics you see in your handout, "Responding to *Dear America: Letters Home From Vietnam*" (Appendix B, p. 76). (Read assignment.) The assignment directs students to write on one of the topics and to utilize images, words, and/or ideas from the film to answer the questions for each topic. Secondary students have the completed activity sheet as a starting point for their writing. This assignment reinforces the analytical skills introduced in this activity and it encourages them to explore their personal responses to the film.

The seven student responses I read earlier were written in response to this assignment. They illustrate that the film has a powerful impact on students, that the small group activity and discussion help students generate thoughtful responses to the film. It is also worthwhile to have students share their responses with their peers. They might read their papers in small groups and/or to the whole class. Small groups might be directed to identify the most powerful papers and read those to the entire class. A follow-up discussion might focus on the images students wrote about and why they had such a powerful impact.

Legacies: The Next Generation: *December Stillness*

In recent years, more and more authors of literature that deals with the Vietnam War have begun to write about the many legacies of the war. One of the most interesting and teachable of these works is Mary Downing Hahn's *December Stillness* (1990). As I previously mentioned, this novel, which was a 1990 ALA preferred choice by Young Adult readers, delves into the homeless veterans issue. In addition, this novel also attempts to deal

with the impact of the war on the family, particularly on the children of those who served in Vietnam.

If you'll turn to the next page of your handout (Appendix B, p. 77), I'll show you one way you might approach teaching this novel. As I mentioned previously, this novel focuses on thirteen year old Kelly McAllister. It is a novel about growing up. In the process of attempting to help Mr. Weems, a traumatized, homeless Vietnam Veteran, Kelly grows emotionally and acquires a social awareness and responsibility. In addition, it is a novel of reconciliation. In a moving final scene at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D. C., Kelly's father, who is a Vietnam Veteran, is able to come to terms with the war, and this enables him to reconcile with his daughter Kelly.

This opinionnaire activity is based on a simple idea. Students have opinions about various subjects, and it attempts to utilize students opinions to interest or engage them in a major theme of the work. The activity is also designed to help prepare students for problems they may encounter in their reading, and it helps prepare students for writing.

How Students View Homelessness

The first step in using the opinionnaire is to distribute it to the class, perhaps the day before it is going to begin the novel. After students have responded to all of the statements, I compile the results on the board. Then, beginning with the statements with which there was the most disagreement, I lead a class discussion that focuses on students' responses to each statement. I encourage students to explain the reasoning behind their responses and to debate differing opinions. For example, when a student

agrees with statement 8, I encourage the student to explain why. The response is usually something like "That is what my dad says all the time." Often other students respond with "Anyone who believes that believes what they write in the National Inquirer." I encourage other students to explain and argue their responses, but I also provide synthesis and direction as the need arises. Since the statements on the opinionnaire require students to take a stand, a lively discussion invariably ensures.

One purpose of the opinionnaire and follow-up discussion is to create interest in the characters and issues in the literature they are about to read. Many of the statements on the opinionnaire are based on ideas expressed by various characters in the novel. Statement 9, for example, is almost exactly what Kelly's grandmother says about homeless people (124). It is perhaps the most common widespread myth about the homeless in America, and it explains one reason why many people are reluctant to do anything about the problem. In the novel, it explains one of the main reasons why many of Kelly's family and friends do not want her to get involved with Mr. Weems.

Student responses to the statments on the opinionnaire that relate to this aspect of the issue usually indicate that many of them believe the same stereotype about homeless people that most Americans do. However, through the class discussion of the statements on the opinionnaire, students begin to question some of their initial responses and are motivated to find out how characters will deal with these issues in the novel.

The disagreement over the statements that is created in the classroom is an important factor in interesting or engaging students in the literature. At the end of the discussion, the teacher might use the disagreement with a statement like, "I see that we have considerable disagreement over statements 6 and 7." (Read statements). "Let's read the novel and find out

which viewpoint is correct." Students are motivated to read because they want to find out if their view of the issue is correct.

More important, this activity provides a framework or context that will help students understand what the author wants reads to understand about homelessness and the other legacies of the Vietnam War. For example, just like most of the characters in the novel, our students fail to see what the war did to some of those who went to Vietnam, and they believe that problems like homelessness are somebody else's problem, not theirs. Many students assume as statement 1 states that there are plenty of private and government programs for homeless people. However, in discussing this statement, students begin to wonder what, if anything, is being done, and what should be done to help the homeless. This statement, and others on the opinionnaire, help students come to the literature with a framework or context that will better enable them to understand the novel they are about to read.

After discussing most or all of the statements on the opinionnaire, students are ready to begin reading the novel. An interesting modification of the procedures I have described is to have students meet in small groups and have them try to read a consensus on their answers before the whole class discussion.

A Conceptual Framework for Study of the Novel

One of the real values of the opinionnaire is that it provides an important framework for studying some key aspects of the novel. As students read the novel, you can have them fill out the opinionnaire according to how various characters would respond to the statements: Kelly,

Mr. McAllister, Mrs. McAllister, Bob Weems, Aunt Eliza, Grandmother, Uncle Ralph, Cousin Allison, Julie, Courtney, Keith, Doug, Mr. Hardy, Mrs. Hunter, and Mrs. Martin. This will enable them to better understand the characters in the novel, and ultimately, enable them to interpret what the author wants readers to understand about homelessness and other legacies of the Vietnam War. After they complete the opinionnaire for a character, I lead a class discussion of their reponses. I also ask them to cite evidence from the novel to support their viewpoints.

Discussions of how various characters would respond to the statements are nearly as lively as those that deal with how students themselves repond to the statements. One reason for this is that students have thought about these issues prior to reading and have already gained confidence in discussing them in class. In addition, the statements on the opinionnaire provide students with specific and concrete ways to talk about the actions and motives of characters.

One of the interesting things about these discussions is that many students cite similarities between the opinions of their parents and those of various characters in the novel. Without prompting on your part, you will likely find, as I did, that many students go beyond the test. They will apply what they are learning to their own lives.

Once students have finished the novel, I ask them to do two more things with the opinionnaire. First, I ask them to fill it out based on how they think the author would. Again, I lead a class discussion of their answers. This lively discussion will take students back to the text to find support for how they think the author would respond. Ultimately, discussing how the author would respond to the statements on the opinionnaire leads to a consideration of what the author is trying to say about the war and the

aftermath of the war, and because of their previous work, this discussion will be at a high level.

Finally, I ask students to fill out the opinionnaire again for themselves and I have them compare their responses to how they responded before they read the novel. Very often opinions have changed. For example, in looking back at how they had marked the twelve statements on the opinionnaire prior to reading the novel, nearly every student usually changes their opinion on at least one statement as a result of their study. I lead a class discussion asking them to explain how and why their opinions have changed. This discussion is important because it helps students begin to see the impact that this literature has had on them.

The Writing Connection

If you will look at the next page of your handout, "*December Stillness* Writing Assiginments" (p. 78), I'll describe some of the assignments I have used with these pre-reading and reading activities, and how they also encourage effective writing.

Keep in mind what has taken place so far. Students have discussed the statements on the opinionnaire prior to reading. This discussion establishes the context, or helps to prepare students for interpreting the novel, and engages them in the characters and themes. Then, as students read the novel, they discussed how the characters would have responded to the statements on the opinionnaire. After they have finished the novel, students discussed how the author would have responded to the items on the opinionnaire. Finally, students discussed how their own responses have or have not changed as a result of having studied the novel.

The disagreement over what the author probably would have said about the statements provides a natural follow-up writing situation, assignment 1. (Read assignment.) Students are motivated in this writing situation because it is real. They are writing to a real audience--their peers! It follows directly out of what they have done in the discussions of the opinionnaire, so they have rehersed arguments, presented evidence and reasoning to support their interpretations, and heard refutations of their viewpoints. They are ready to write. And, they have a reason to write--to convince their peers to change their concusions. This is literary analysis as it should be.

Another possible follow-up writing activity is to have students write an interpretive essay about the novel. (Read assignment 2.) In this assignment, students are asked to interpret what the author is trying to say about the war and the legacies of the war. Again, the opinionnaire discussion activities have helped students to make interpretations and how to turn their interpretations into written analytical essays. They gain confidence as a result of their participation in the sequence of discussion activities I have described.

The third assignment focuses on character analysis and asks students to explain how the main character changes as a result of her experiences. (Read assignment.) While the opinionnaire activities do help students with this assignment, I really think there are some other things you would probably need to do some additional things. If you ar interested, you might want to tak a look at my book, *Illumination Rounds: Teaching the Literature of the Vietnam War* (Urbana: NCTE, 1992), which contains a whole series of activities designed to prepare students for this assignment.

Assignment 4 follows directly from the class discussion of how students' opinions have or have not changed as a result of reading the novel. (Read assignment.) This assignment is both a personal response and involves some literary analysis. Students have success with this assignment because they have thought about and discussed their opinions before reading and after reading the novel, and they are able to explain how their opinions have changed as a result of reading it. Without the opinionnaire activity before reading the novel that requires them to articulate and defend their opinions, their written responses to this assignment would not be very good.

Assignment 5 is a creative assignment. (Read assignment.) Students usually have little difficultly with this assignment because in essence they have discussed this pretty thoroughly when they discussed how the characters would have responded to the statements on the opinionnaire, and in their discussions of the opinionnaire after reading the novel. In other words, they usually have plenty of ideas for writing. In addition, some students are often quite anxious to show how they believe the characters would have acted based on their interpretations of the novel. You may need to spend a little time on writing dialogue to prepare them for this assignment.

The last assignment asks for a personal response to the novel. (Read assignment.) It follows directly from the discissions prior to, during, and after their reading. In these discussions students are rehersing what they are going to be asked to do in this writing assignment.

I am not trying to argue for one assignment over another. It really depends on your students and your situation, you might want to give just one of these assignments, or you might want to give them a choice between

two or more assignments. What I want you to see is how the activities I have described helps to prepare students for reading and writing, engages them in reading and responding to the novel, helps them to interpret the novel, helps them to transform their interpretations into sophisticated written responses, and, perhaps most important of all, helps them to relate what they are reading to their own lives.

Conclusion

I have attempted to show you some literature that has come out of the war that you might want to try teaching in your own classes. Also, I have tried to show you some ways to teach this literature that encourages response. I have attempted to explain why I believe it is important that we teach the literature of the Vietnam War. I have only been able to show you a few short examples of students' responses to some of the literature, discuss briefly some major types of literature that have come out of the war, suggest a couple of approaches to teaching this literature that foster response, and discuss a few of the ways that this literature speaks directly to students. However, after years of teaching the literature of the Vietnam War, it is my students who continually remind me of a simple truth about this literature, and indeed all literature, if it is worth studying--it is the characters, the human beings, that hold their interest, fascinate them, and evoke their empathy, and it is through the characters that they come to understand some truths about the Vietnam War. The reason for this is perhaps best stated by Mark Baker, who writes,

War poses all the hard philosophical questions about

> life and death and morality and demands immediate answers. The abstractions of scholarly debate become the very concrete matters of survival. In one short year, Vietnam took the measure of a man and of the culture that put him there. War strips away the thin veneer applied slap-dash by the institutions of society and shows Man for exactly what he is. We must listen closely to the men and women who became both the victims and the perpetrators of the war, if we want to learn something real about this particular conflict, something real about the human spirit, something real about ourselves. (1981, xvi)

In other words, this literature speaks to students because the characters speak directly to them about the important issues that concern us all. This literature fosters response because in it students find what seems to elude them so often with much of the literature we ask them to read: they find answers to their questions, and as a result, they are empowered to face the issues that affect their lives and their future.

Teaching the literature of the Vietnam War can enliven literature study in our classrooms because through it we can encourage response, show students the value of literature, all literature, and help them make the kinds of connections to literature, to the past, that will enrich their lives long after they leave our classrooms. In short, if we teach the literature of the Vietnam War in ways that are more than exercises in literary appreciation and analysis, then, to use Kroll's words, it can "foster personal connection and critical reflection," or, to borrow a phrase from the war, transform students' "hearts and minds."

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APPENDIX A

SELECTED AND ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE LITERATURE OF THE VIETNAM WAR

The Literature of the Vietnam War: An Annotated Bibliography

Part I: Adolescent Literature and the Vietnam War:

A Blue-Eyed Daisy. Cynthia Rylant. Dell. 1987. 181 pp . $2.95 ISBN 0-440-40927-6
Eleven-year-old Ellie Farley's uncle Joe goes off to war She is confused about wars wars and men killing one another and even more confused by her family's and uncle's silence upon his return. Middle school/junior high

A Boat to Nowhere. Maureen Crane Wartski. NAL-Dutton. 1981, 160 pp., $2.95. ISBN 0-553-25560-6.
Villagers protest Thay Van Chi's protection of a wandering orphan. They appear to be right when the boy seems to side with the Vietcong when they arrive What the villagers do not realize is that the boy is acting so that he will have an opportunity to save them. The villagers become boat people and must endure terrible hardships and dangers. Junior high up.

Caribou. Meg Wolitzer. Bantam. 1986, 176 pp., $2.50. ISBN 0-553-25560-6.
Becca Silverman, a twelve-year-old, is troubled by the Vietnam War In fact, she is troubled by the idea of war in general. Her brother escapes to Canada to avoid the draft. She decides to paint a vivid antiwar picture as her entry in the school's art contest, whose theme is patriotism. Middle school/junior high.

Charlie Pippin. Candy Dawson Boyd. Puffin Books, 1987, 192 pp., $3.95. ISBN 0-14-032587-5.
The father of eleven-year-old Charlie returns home from Vietnam a bitter, rigid man. Charlie tries to understand her father by studying about the Vietnam War. She discovers that her father is a decorated war hero. The novel examines how too many blacks had to fight the war. Middle school/junior high

Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam. Ed. Bernard Edelman. Pocket, 1986, 316 pp., $6.95. ISBN 0-671-61750-8.
This is a collection of letters home from those serving and working in Vietnam during the war in all areas from soldiers to donut dollies. The last chapter, "Last Letters," is powerful and heartbreaking. A 1989 ALA preferred choice by Young Adult readers. Senior high up.

December Stillness. Mary Downing Hahn. Avon,1990,192 pp., $2.95. ISBN 0-380-70764-0.
This 1990 ALA preferred choice by Young Adult readers focuses on thirteen-year-old Kelly McAlister. Kelly gains an enriched view of life beyond the routine of school when she attempts to befriend Mr. Weems, a disturbed, homeless Vietnam veteran. In the process of helping him, Kelly grows emotionally and acquires social awareness and responsibility. Middle school up.

Fallen Angels. Walter Dean Myers. Scholastic, 1988, 309 pp., $3.50. ISBN 0-590-40943-3.
Selected as a 1990 *EJ* reviewers' choice (five reviewers) and a 1990 ALA preferred choice by Young Adult readers. this novel tells the story of Richie Perry, 17 who enlists to fight in Vietnam as a way out of a dead-end life in Harlem. He experiences all of the horrors of war as well as the racial conflict that existed among American troops. Richie questions his religious faith and his moral values. Junior high up.

Hello, My Name Is Scrambled Eggs. Jamie Gilson. Minstrel Books, 1988, 183 pp., $3.95. ISBN 0-671-74104-7
Tuan Nguyen is a Vietnamese refugee who arrives in America to live with the

Trumble family in a small town in Illinois. Their son, Harvey, is a seventh grader grader who tries to mold Tuan into an "American kid." Middle school/junior high

Homecoming: When the Soldiers Returned from Vietnam. Bob Greene. Ballantine, 1990, 256 pp., $4.95. ISBN 0-345-36408-2
This is an interesting collection of letters by Vietnam veterans who wrote to author and syndicated columnist Bob Greene after he had asked his readers whether anyone had spat upon them when they came home from the war. It reports on the collision between the war in Asia and the war the vets faced at home Senior high up.

If I Die in a Combat Zone. Tim O'Brien. Dell, 1987, 205 pp., $4.50 ISBN 0-440-34311-9.
Besides being named ALA Best Book for Young Adults in 1973, this is considered by some as one of the most important works to come out of the war. It is the story of one soldier's journey from safe, middle-class America to the center of the horror of the Vietnam War. O'Brien emphasizes the fear and the moral dilemmas. Senior high up.

In Country. Bobbie Ann Mason. Harper-Collins,1989, 368 pp., $5.95. ISBN 0-06-080959-0.
Besides being chosen as a 1990 *EJ* reviewers' choice (three reviewers), this effective novel tells the story of Samantha Hughes, a recent high school graduate who wants answers about the Vietnam War. Her father was killed in the war. Her mother can't really tell her anything about her father since they were married only a month before his death. Her uncle, Emmett, with whom she lives, could be suffering ill effects from exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam. She is attracted to another Vietnam vet who is emotionally scarred by the war. Senior high up.

In the Combat Zone: An Oral History of American Women in Vietnam, 1966-1975. Kathryn Marshall. Viking, 1988, 280 pp., $7.95. ISBN 0-14-010829-7.
The author interviewed twenty women who tell about their experiences in the war. They relate their many motives for going to Vietnam, their experiences, and the impact the war had on their lives. Marshall interviewed army nurses, Red Cross workers, and civilians. Senior high up.

Park's Quest. Katherine Paterson. Puffin Books,1989, 180 pp., $3.95. ISBN 0-14-034262-1.
The author describes the effects of the war on the children of those who served. The main character, Park, comes to his grandfather's farm in Virginia to learn more about his father, who died in Vietnam, and his father's family. He meets a Vietnamese-American girl named Thanh, who may be his half-sister. Junior high up.

Pocket Change. Kathryn Jensen. Scholastic, 1990, 169 pp., $2.95. ISBN 0-590-43419-5.
This 1991 ALA preferred choice by Young Adult readers focuses on some of the effects of the war on the families and children of those who served in Vietnam. Josie's life falls apart when her father's increasingly erratic and violent behavior threatens their family. Determined to help him, she pieces together clues from his past and becomes convinced that his experiences in the Vietnam War are continuing to haunt him. Junior high up.

Travelers. Larry Bograd. Lippincott, 1986, 192 pp., $11.90. ISBN 0-397-32128-7.
A boy is haunted by the image of the father he never knew, who died in Vietnam. He tries to find out more about him. He questions the adults around him, but they avoid his questions. As the boy uncovers the truth, he discovers the unhealed wounds that the war has left all around him. Junior high up.

The Voyage of Lucky Dragon. Jack Bennett. Prentice-Hall. 1985. 156 pp., $5.95. ISBN 0-13944158-1

After the fall of Saigon, a Vietnamese family flees the Communist reeducation camps in a fishing boat bound for Australia. This novel examines the plight of the boat people. Senior high.

What Should We Tell Our Children about Vietnam? Bill McCloud. Berkley, 1989. 155 pp. $4.50. ISBN 0-425-13361-3.
The author, a Vietnam veteran and junior high school social studies teacher, wondered what to tell his students about Vietnam. He wrote to the people who directed, fought, protested, and reported the war. These 128 letters form a remarkable cross section of public opinion from statesmen, veterans, protestors, writers, and others. Some of the contributing writers and filmmakers include Allen Ginsberg, Larry Heinemann, John Hersey, Ken Kesey, Tim O'Brien, Oliver Stone, Kurt Vonnegut, and many others. Middle school up.

Part II: Some Important and Teachable Literature of the Vietnam War:

Born on the Fourth of July. Ron Kovic. Pocket, 1976, 224 pp., $4.50. ISBN 0-671-52792-4.
An important book in Vietnam War literature. Kovic describes his idealistic enlistment in the Marines, his service in Vietnam, his painful return home in a wheelchair, and his treatment at the hands of the Veterans Administration. He also tells of his involvement in the antiwar movement, attending the Republican Convention, and disrupting Nixon's acceptance speech.

Close Quarters. Larry Heinemann. Penguin, 1974, 336 pp., $8.95. ISBN 0-140-08678-5.
This classic novel of the war follows the coming of age of Philip Dosier and his fellow soldiers in Vietnam, where they learn that war is nothing like a John Wayne movie. Dosier returns home stunned by his experiences and deadened to emotions.

Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam. Dir. Bill Couturie. Couturie Co. and Vietnam Veterans Ensemble Theater Company, 1988. (84 minutes, color.) HBO Home Video.
A powerful documentary featuring pictures and film of the war with voice-overs by dozens of Hollywood stars reading the words of American GIs. The film follows a chronology that roughly corresponds to a soldier's year in Vietnam. The readings are from the collection of letters with the same title.

Fields of Fire. James Webb. Bantam, 1978, 415 pp., $5.95. ISBN 0-553-25679-3.
In this major novel of the Vietnam War, a Marine unit fights the Vietcong, endures unbelievable living conditions, confronts the dangers of the "bush," and faces death and injury. Webb explores the reasons each man became a Marine, as the reader follows him through combat. The novel also examines the difficulties veterans face when they return home.

Fragments. Jack Fuller. Dell, 1984, 287 pp., $4.50. ISBN 0-440-12687-8.
This is one of the major Vietnam novels. Fuller presents a vivid account of the wartime experiences and friendship between two young men. The two soldiers symbolize different points of view about how to survive. In the course of the story, both are wounded, and one of the men kills a Vietnamese family.

Going after Cacciato. Tim O'Brien. Dell, 1978, 395 pp., $4.50. ISBN 0-440-12966-4.
This 1979 National Book Award winner is an account of a soldier's flight from battle that alternates between fantasy and reality. Paul Berlin, shocked by the horror and hopelessness of the war, walks away from his unit in the jungle, hoping to make his way to Paris. He is pursued by a group of soldiers.

Home Before Morning: The Story of an Army Nurse in Vietnam Lynda Van Devanter Warner. 1983, 382 pp., $4.95. ISBN 0-446-30962-1.
The author tells of her experiences during her tour of duty: her change from an idealist who once viewed the war as a chance to save a country from communist control: the problems she had when she returned home, including being treated as "a murderer rather than a healer": and her experiences with posttraumatic stress disorder. This is a powerful narrative.

Nam: The Vietnam War in the Words of the Men and Women Who Fought There. Mark Baker. Berkley, 1981, 301 pp., $4.50. ISBN 0-425-07168-5.
One of the classics of Vietnam War literature. The author interviewed both men and women, officers, enlisted men of all kinds, prowar and antiwar veternas. He asked them, "What was Vietnam really like?" The result is a powerful, honest, and touchingly written book. The introduction is effective, and the interviews are organized around themes, which permits easy analysis and allows for useful comparison with other war literature.

The Quiet American. Graham Greene. Viking, 1955, 249 pp., $8.95.
An influential and prophetic novel of Vietnam War literature, this work describes American involvement in Vietnam before it actually happened. This is the story of a jaded British war correspondent in Saigon whose uninvolved life is upset by a young American government agent who falls in love with the correspondent's Vietnamese mistress. The American is full of good intentions, but his naivete leads to trouble.

A Rumor of War. Philip Caputo. Ballantine, 1977, 328 pp., $4.95. ISBN 0-345-29070-4.
One of the major works of the war. Caputo was a young Marine infantry officer for sixteen months in Vietnam, beginning in 1965. He presents a grim, honest picture of the war. He recounts that the soldier's enemies were boredom and climate as much as the Viet Cong. Caputo provides an effective feeling for what fighting in Vietnam was really like.

The Thirteenth Valley. John M. Del Vecchio. Bantam, 1982, 666 pp., $6.95. ISBN 0-553-23560-5.
This is one of the best of the Vietnam War Novels: it tells the story of three men involved in a major combat mission in the Khe Ta Laou Valley in 1970. The book contains realistic portrayals of the men and their fears before and in battle. The author also describes the companionship the men find in each other, and their actions in the final jungle battle.

365 Days. Ronald J. Glasser, M. D. Bantam, 1971, 245 pp., $4.50. ISBN 0-553-07372-1.
An important book in Vietnam War literature. It is well-written and contains elements of memoir, oral history, and fiction. Glasser was an Army doctor who relates his experiences in Zama Hospital in Japan where he treated the wounded who were sent there from Vietnam.

Sympathy for the Devil. Kent Anderson. Warner, 1987, 350 pp., $5.50. ISBN 0-446-35222-5.
This is an effective novel in which the main character, Hanson, comes to Vietnam as a naive, liberal, college-educated young man. After a series of atrocities and deaths, the horror of battle, and the despair of the war, Hanson becomes a hardened soldier

APPENDIX B

TEACHING ACTIVITIES

The Vietnam Experience: The Adolescent Experience in Combat Narratives of the Vietnam War

1. **The mystique of pre-induction:**
   - What are the main character's attitudes toward war? Patriotism?
   - What is his or her attitude toward the war in Vietnam?
   - What are major influences on the main character's attitudes?
   - Why does he or she decide to go to war?
2. **The initiation into boot camp--the culture of the military:**
   - What difficulties does the main character have adjusting to life in the military?
   - What are significant experiences in recruit training? Why?
   - How does the main character change as a result of recruit training?
   - How does recruit training attempt to prepare young people for the war in Vietnam? Is it effective? Why or why not?
3. **The dislocation of arrival in Vietnam--culture shock:**
   - How does the main character travel to Vietnam?
   - What are his or her initial experiences upon arrival in country?
   - How does he or she react to these experiences?
   - How are the Vietnamese portrayed?
4. **The confrontation with mortality in the first firefight:**
   - How does the main character react the first time in combat?
   - What impact does this experience have on the main character?
   - What are the concerns of the main character and others around him or her?
5. **Experience and Consideration:**
   - How and why do the concerns of the characters change over time?
   - What is the main character's attitude toward the war, the military, America, and the Vietnamese? How and why has his or her attitude changed?
   - What experiences have had an impact on the main characters? Why?
   - What difficult moral choices does the main character consider? How does s/he respond? Why?
6. **The phenomenon of coming home:**
   - How does the main character leave Vietnam?
   - What is his or her reaction to leaving?
   - What is the main character's return to the United States like?
   - How has the main character changed?
   - What is his or her attitude toward the war?
   - How do people at home treat the main character?
7. **Putting It Together: Central Meaning:**
   - What is the author telling readers about the Vietnam War?
   - What is the author saying about war?
   - What is the author saying about courage? Friendship?

Depending on the work, some or all of the following questions may also be important:

8. **Structure:**
   - How is the novel structured?
   - How does the structure contribute to the meaning?
9. **Style and literary technique:**
   - What is the point of view of the novel? Who is telling the story?
   - Does the point of view change? If so, how?
   - How does the point of view contribute to the meaning?
   - What are major literary techniques the author uses?
   - How do these techniques contribute to the meaning?

Adapted from Johannessen, Larry R. (1992). *Illumination Rounds: Teaching the Literature of the Vietnam War* Urbana NCTE.

YA Combat Narratives of the Vietnam War: Writing Assignments

1. **Writing about the narrative:** Write an essay in which you interpret what the author is saying about the Vietnam War. Make sure that you use evidence from the work to support your interpretation of what the author wants readers to understand about the Vietnam War. Also, make sure that you explain how your evidence supports your interpretation of the work.

2. **Writing about the main character:** Write an essay in which you explain how the main character changes as a result of his or her experiences. What was the character like before entering the military and going to war? What were his or her values? What was the character like at the end of the novel? How has the character changed? What are his or her values? Has the character grown or matured? What experiences caused these changes? If you do not believe the character changes, how do you account for the way he or she is at the end of the work? Make sure that you use evidence from the work to support your analysis of the character and explain how your evidence supports your analysis.

3. **Writing about/in response to the narrative:** Write a composition in which you explain what you learned about the Vietnam War as a result of your study of the work. Make sure you explain what your opinions and views regarding the Vietnam War were before reading the work, what your opinions and views are now after reading it, and provide specific evidence from the novel to explain how and why your opinions and views have changed.

4. **Writing in response to the narrative:** The Vietnam War has been called "the war that won't go away": a number of issues such as the POW/MIA's continue to divide the nation; the legacies of the war have a strong impact on the nation's foreign policy decisions; and now the legacies of the war are affecting and will probably continue to affect the children of the Vietnam generation. Write an essay in which you explain why you believe the Vietnam War will not go away. How are the themes, issues, and controversies that are raised in the narrative you read (or that you know about from other sources) still with us today? In your opinion, what can be done to help the nation heal the wounds of the war?

Discussion Questions for "Introduction" and "Initiation: Ask Not": Mark Baker's *NAM: The Vietnam War in the Words of the Men and Women Who Fought There*

1. According to the author, what is wrong with the story of Vietnam that has been told so far?

2. How did the author come to write the book? What is most surprising about the author's past? Is it understandable that Vietnam veterans would be wary of him? Why or why not?

3. What warning does Baker give about reading the "war stories" in the book? What does he mean by "the apocryphal aspects have more to do with metaphor than with deceit"?

4. According to the author, why must readers listen to these stories? Why must we deal more honestly and thoroughly with the Vietnam war?

5. Where does the subtitle "Ask Not" come from? Why does Baker use this to introduce this section? Is it meant to be ironic? Why or why not?

6. Where do the people come from (urban cities, suburbs, rural areas) who went to Vietnam? What sorts of backgrounds do they come from? How old are most of the speakers?

7. How did they find their way into the military? What seems to have had an effect on many of them in terms of their reasons for going?

8. What was boot camp like for most of them? Do you think it is good training for Vietnam? Why or why not?

9. How are the experiences described by women in this section different from the experiences described by men? How are they alike?

10. Which of the stories in this section had the most impact on you? Why?

Adapted from Johannessen, Larry R. (1992). *Illumination Rounds: Teaching the Literature of the Vietnam War*. Urbana: NCTE, pp 69-71

Small Group Assignment: *NAM*

Directions: As a member of the small group to which you have been assigned, prepare a twenty to twenty-five minute oral presentation that answers the following questions about the section your small group has been assigned. The group may organize answers in any manner desired; however, the questions below should be answered in some fashion. The only other requirement is that all members of the group must participate in the oral presentation. Being absent does not excuse you from your responsibilities. If you fail to show up, the group will have to do it without you. The section assignments are as follows: group #1: "Baptism of Fire," pp 29-76; group #2: "Grunts," pp. 79-128; group #3: "Martial Arts," pp. 129-164; group #4: "Victors," pp. 167-196; group #5: "Victims," pp. 197-236; group #6: "Homecoming," pp. 239-268; group #7: "Casualties," pp. 269-296.

1. What main points (at least two) does the author make about the subject of this section?

2. What evidence from the speakers in this section support your conclusions from #1, and how does the evidence support them?

3. What else in this section did you find interesting or important? Why?

4. How does the introduction (perhaps including the title) to the section prepare readers for the stories that follow?

5. How would you characterize the experiences described by the speakers? What impact did the experiences described have on the speakers?

6. How are the experiences of women (and/or other minorities) in this section different from the experiences of men who served in Vietnam? How are they alike? What do you conclude from these?

7. What evidence from the speakers in this section support your conclusions from #6, and how does the evidence support them?

8. How does what you learn in this section relate to the book as a whole?

9. Which stories in this section (no more than three) had the most impact on you? Why? **OR,** What did you learn about the Vietnam War from this section that you did not know before reading it?

10. How does what you learn in this section contribute to the historical record of the war? Why? **OR,** How effective is this section as a part of a work of literature? Why?

NAM: Writing Assignments

1 **Writing about *NAM*:** Baker argues that the cumulative effect of the war on the young people who went to Vietnam is that by the time they came home from the war they were "nineteen-year-old bodies with thirty-five-year-old minds." Write an essay in which you explain the most significant experiences that turn these teenagers into "old kids." Make sure that you include evidence from the book to support your points.

2. **Writing about *NAM* as literature and/or history**: You are a member of your school's book selection committee. The committee consists of a member of the school board, a school administrator, a teacher, a parent from the community, and a student. The committee has been asked to decide if Mark Baker's *NAM* should be added to the curriculum. Each member of the committee has been asked to read the book and write a recommendation that will be read by the committee. Write your recommendation to the committee. In writing your recommendation, consider some or all of the following questions: What value might studying this work have? Is this work good literature and/or history? Is it effective? Why or why not? What might students learn from studying this work? How important is what students might learn?

3. **Writing about the Vietnam experience:** Describe one or two aspects of the Vietnam experience, such as the homecoming or the arrival in Vietnam. What was this experience like? What are key features of the experience? Make sure that you include evidence from the book to support your conclusions or generalizations about the aspect(s) of the Vietnam experience that you have chosen.

4. **Writing from *NAM*:** Interview a Vietnam veteran about his or her experiences in the war. Use the information in *NAM* as the basis for your interview. Then, write a composition in which you compare the responses you obtained from the Vietnam veteran to the stories contained in the book. How do your interviewee's experiences compare to those in the book? In what ways are this veteran's experiences typical of those in Baker's book? What is unique about this veteran's experiences?

5. **Writing in response to *NAM*:** Write about a time that you or someone you know had a traumatic experience that made you or this other person old before your time. What was the experience? What thoughts and feelings did you have during and after the experience? In *NAM*, many of the men and women talk about coming face to face with their own mortality or constantly trying to deal with the horrors of the war. What was it about the experience you are writing about that made you or this person old before your time? How did you or this person change as a result of the experience?

Thinking about the Vietnam War

Directions: Below is a series of statements. Circle the response which most closely indicates how you feel about the statement Be prepared to explain your answers

1. "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country "
   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. Rambo is a good image for Americans to have of the Vietnam veteran. he represents all that America stands for and the American soldier in war
   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. "The only heroes in war are the dead ones."
   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. "My country right or wrong" is not just a slogan--it is every citizen's patriotic duty.
   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. No cause, political or otherwise, is worth dying for.
   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. Most American soldiers participated in acts of brutality against Vietnamese civilians.
   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. It is never right to kill another person.
   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. The soldiers who served in the Vietnam War did so because they were very patriotic.
   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. Movies like Rambo are very bad because they show a distorted view of what war is really like and of what it is like to be a soldier.
   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. "The soldier, above all other people, prays for peace, for he must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war."
    Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

11. The Vietnam War was a guerrilla war; therefore, it is understandable that Vietnamese civilians suffered as a result of American military actions.
    Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

12. People should never compromise their ideals or beliefs.
    Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

13. In the Vietnam War, the difference between death and survival often meant not worrying about potential harm to innocent civilians or doing the right or moral thing.
    Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

14. When Vietnam veterans came home from the war, most Americans treated them as returning heroes.
    Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Adapted from Johannessen, Larry R. (1992). *Illumination Rounds: Teaching the Literature of the Vietnam War*. Urbana: NCTE.

Discussion Questions for "Centurion" and "We Have Met the Enemy"

1. How would the narrator and Bates in "Centurion" have reacted had they been in the situation Hucks and Leland were confronted with in "We Have Met the Enemy"?

2. What evidence leads you to your conclusion?

3. How would Hucks and Leland have reacted had they been in the situation the narrator and Bates faced in "Centurion"?

4. What evidence leads you to your conclusion?

5. What is the inevitable outcome in each situation in these stories? Why?

6. What is each author trying to tell us about the Vietnam War and/or war?

Adapted from Jobannessen, Larry R. (1992). *Illumination Rounds: Teaching the Literature of the Vietnam War*. Urbana: NCTE.

Vietnam War Writing Assignments

1. **Writing about "Centurion" or "We Have Met the Enemy"**: Write a letter to someone in the class who disagrees with you about O'Brien's stand on one or two of the statements on the opinionnaire. Try to convince this person that he or she is wrong and that your interpretation is correct. Make sure that you use evidence from "Centurion" to support your viewpoint that O'Brien would agree or disagree with a particular statement on the opinionnaire.

Write a letter to someone in the class who disagrees with you about Moore's stand on one or two of the statements on the opinionnaire. Try to convince this person that he or she is wrong and that your interpretation is correct. Make sure that you use evidence from "We Have Met the Enemy" to support your viewpoint that Moore would agree or disagree with a particular statement on the opinionnaire.

2. **Writing about the Vietnam War**: Read the story given to you. Then, write an essay in which you interpret what the author is saying about the Vietnam War. Make sure that you use evidence from the story to support your interpretation of what the author wants readers to understand about the Vietnam War. Also, make sure that you explain how your evidence supports your interpretation of the story.

3. **Writing about/in response to "Centurion" and/or "We Have Met the Enemy"**: Write a composition in which you explain how your opinion has changed and why you have changed your opinion about one or two of the statements on the opinionnaire after reading "Centurion" and/or "We Have Met the Enemy." Make sure that you explain what your opinion was before reading the stories and why, what your opinion is now after reading one or both stories, and provide specific evidence from one or both stories to explain how and why your opinion has changed.

4. **Writing from "Centurion" or "We Have Met the Enemy"**: Write a new scene for "Centurion" or "We Have Met the Enemy." Imagine that the narrator and Bates find themselves in a situation similar to the one Hucks and Leland were confronted with in "We Have Met the Enemy" or Hucks and Leland find themselves in a situation similar to the one the narrator and Bates were confronted with in "Centurion." Describe how the narrator and Bates would have reacted or how Hucks and Leland would have reacted. Will the narrator and Bates kill the shadowy figure that they see run into a cave behind their position? Why or why not? Will Hucks and Leland do more to help the old men than the narrator and Bates did? Why or why not? Make sure that your scene is consistent with how the characters are portrayed in the story and that you have some dialogue between characters.

5. **Writing in response to "Centurion" or "We Have Met the Enemy"**: Write about a time that you or someone you know had to make a difficult choice in which no matter what course of action was taken there would be unpleasant or negative consequences. What was the situation? What choice had to be made? What did you or this person decide to do? Why? In the two stories, the characters have no desire to harm innocent people, and yet they make decisions that result in acts of brutality. In the situation you are writing about, what were the unpleasant or negative consequences of the choice? What did you or this person learn from this experience?

Some Themes from *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam*

1. Without a clear purpose in Vietnam, killing the enemy became the only goal.

   a. "Our mission is to find VC and kill them."

   b. _____

2. The killing became easy and soldiers became callous and even cruel.

   a. "Instead of a yellow streak, you got a mean streak."

   b _____

3. The many frustrations, the terror, the death and destruction, the young age of most of the soldiers, the lack of clear purpose, all seemed to produce a kind of insanity.

   a. "They're just kids, 18, 19. I got to get out of here."

   b. For awhile when I read your letters, I'm a normal person again."

   c. _____

4. _____

   _____

   a. "Move without contact. We are all scared. The VC are all around us."

   b. "The night belongs to Charlie."

   c. _____

   d. _____

5. _____

   _____

   a. _____

   b. _____

   c. _____

   d. _____

Adapted from Johannessen, Larry R. (1992). *Illumination Rounds: Teaching the Literature of the Vietnam War*. Urbana: NCTE.

Responding to *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam*

Select one of the following topics on *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam* and write a short composition that answers the questions given in the topic you select.

Topic A: Movie critics have described the film as "a wrenching experience. . . . You're not likely to find a more moving movie experience on any screen." What things (at least two) struck you the most about the film? Why? What kind of impact did they have? Be as specific as you can in describing the images, words, and/or ideas that had an impact on you and why they struck you.

Topic B: While the film never becomes a praise of the war is Southeast Asia, it does become a kind of tribute to the men and women who had to fight in Vietnam. In what ways (at least two) does the film pay tribute to the men and women who served in Vietnam? Be specific in identifying the ways and in presenting examples (images, words, and/or ideas) that illustrate these ways.

Topic C: One film critic has said, "What the men and women in Vietnam felt and saw takes on a disturbing reality all its own and becomes a poignant appeal for peace. Yes, an eloquent cry for peace." How is the film an appeal for peace (at least two ways)? Be specific in identifying how the film is an appeal for peace and in presenting examples (images, words, and/or ideas) that illustrate these ways?

Adapted from Johannessen, Larry R. (1992). *Illumination Rounds: Teaching the Literature of the Vietnam War*. Urbana: NCTE.

Homelessness in America

Directions: Read each of the following statements. Write *A* if you agree with the statement or *D* if you disagree with it.

Agree or
Disagree

_____ 1. With all of the help available from government and private programs, there is no reason for anyone to be homeless in America.

_____ 2. Homeless people wouldn't be homeless if they would clean themselves up, get a haircut, and find a job.

_____ 3. The Vietnam War has little, if anything, to do with the homeless problem in America.

_____ 4. Homeless people are not much different from you and me. They have just run into some bad luck.

_____ 5. Homeless people should not be permitted in public buildings, such as libraries or museums.

_____ 6. Many homeless people have severe psychological problems and are dangerous.

_____ 7. Many homeless people do have emotional or psychological problems, and what they need most is professional help.

_____ 8. Many homeless people live better than the average American because they receive free handouts and shelter and have no responsibilities.

_____ 9. Most homeless people are drunks or drug addicts.

_____ 10. To be safe, the average person should avoid contact with homeless people.

_____ 11. Homeless Vietnam veterans who blame the war for their problems are just bums using Vietnam as an excuse.

_____ 12. Homeless people are vagrants and should be arrested and put in jail.

December Stillness Writing Assignments

1. **Writing about the novel:** Write a letter to someone in the class who disagrees with you about Downing Hahn's stand on two of the statements on the opinionnaire. Try to convince this person that he or she is wrong and that your interpretation is correct. Make sure that you use evidence from *December Stillness* to support your viewpoint that Downing Hahn would agree or disagree with a particular statement on the opinionnaire.

2. **Writing about the novel:** The novel deals with important issues regarding war and the aftermath or legacies of the Vietnam War. Write an essay in which you interpret what is the author saying about war and the aftermath of the Vietnam War What are the effects of war on veterans, on their families, and on their children? What are the effects of the war on society? What can someone do about the wounds of this war? In presenting your viewpoint, provide specific supporting evidence from the book and careful reasoning.

3. **Writing about the main character:** Write an essay in which you explain how Kelly McAllister changes as a result of her experiences. What was she like before she attempts to befriend Mr. Weems? What were her values then? What is her attitude toward the war and the homeless? What did she think of her father and mother and other people in her life? What is Kelly like at the end of the novel? How has she changed? What are her values? Has she grown or matured? How? What caused these changes? Make sure that you use evidence from the novel to support your analysis of the character and explain how your evidence supports your analysis.

4. **Writing about/in response to the novel:** Write a composition in which you explain how your opinion has changed and why you have changed your opinion about two of the statements on the opinionnaire after reading *December Stillness*. Make sure that you explain what your opinion was before reading the novel and why, what your opinion is now after reading it, and provide specific evidence from the novel to explain how and why your opinion has changed.

5. **Writing from the novel:** Write a new scene for the novel. Imagine that Kelly gets one more chance to try to reach Mr. Weems. Perhaps Kelly confronts him in the little strip of woods where he sleeps on Steadman Farm Way, or she might meet him again at Lake Columbus? What does Kelly say to him this time that she hasn't already said? How does she try to reach him? Describe how Mr. Weems reacts to Kelly? What does he say? What does he do? What is the outcome of the encounter? Make sure that your scene is consistent with how the characters are portrayed in the novel and that you have some dialogue between characters.

6. **Writing in response to the novel:** The author argues that the legacies of the Vietnam War, such as the homeless problem, continue to have an impact on the nation. In fact, the author suggests that the legacies of the war are affecting and will probably continue to affect the children of the Vietnam generation. Write a composition in which you explain why you believe the Vietnam War continues to haunt the nation. How are the themes, issues, and controversies that are raised in the novel (or what you know about from other sources) still with us today? In the novel, Kelly at least tries to help Mr Weems, and she tries to tell others about the plight of veterans like Mr. Weems. In your opinion, what can be done to help the nation heal the wounds of the war? Are the actions Kelly took enough? Do more people need to do things like what Kelly does? What else can be done?